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THE
IMPORTANCE
OF
FAITH.

To which is added,
A SKETCH
OF THE
ALMIGHTY'S PROCEEDINGS
WITH HIS
CREATURE MAN.

L O N D O N:

Printed for T. BECKET and P. A. DEHOND,
in the Strand. 1768.

IMPORTANCE

F A I L



ALMIGHTY'S PROCEEDINGS

CREATING MAN

L O V E

Printed for T. Hooker and J. A. Deane
in the Strand, 1783



P R E F A C E.



THE false, or confused notion too many zealous christians entertain of Faith, (that Faith, I mean, which the scripture speaks of as imputed to men for Righteousness) has given occasion to another set of persons to despise and ridicule the very term.

The author's view, in this little tract, is, according to his ability, to set it in a true light, for the use of such, of either party, who may not have opportunity, leisure, or inclination to peruse larger dissertations.

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For this reason, he has suggested the use, and even necessity of divine Revelation, to the well-being of mankind from the very beginning of the world. And, to obviate the great objection taken from the supposed non-universality of divine Revelation, particularly the Gospel Revelation, has intimated his opinion, that the most merciful God will ever accept of a Faith proportioned to the Revelation actually afforded men; which opinion he thinks sufficiently founded on scripture, as well as reason.

The short sketch at the end appeared some years since in a periodical Paper, and, for its near affinity in sentiment with this, is added to it.

T H E



T H E
I M P O R T A N C E
O F
F A I T H.

*Without Faith it is impossible to please
God. Heb. xi. 6.*



T must undoubtedly be man's highest concern, if it be possible, *to please God*; to be acceptable to that great Being in whom he lives, and moves, and has his being; upon whom he continually depends for life and breath, and all things. This is man's most justifiable, most laudable ambition: And it is very far from being *impossible*. The best of Beings cannot be *implacable*, or even *hard* to be pleased by his creatures. He did not make creatures to be the objects of his own

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aversion, but of approbation and complacency. He beheld every thing that he had made, and behold it was very good, *Gen. i. 31.* Nor can it be thought the *rational part* of the Creation is the least acceptable to him. They are capable of knowing him, of being sensible of their origin from, and dependance upon him; capable of actually relying on him, reverencing him, freely obeying him, and humbly imitating his moral attributes; in short, capable of religion; and in this exercise of their rational powers *they* must be distinguishingly acceptable to him: but without *this* it is impossible for *them* to please him. For without *this* they abuse, instead of using aright, the *rational nature*, and that degree of *freedom* with which he has intrusted them.

What then can that *Faith* be which is so necessary to our acceptance with God? What else but a sincere, humble, grateful, dutiful regard to God, and reliance upon him, proportionable to the knowledge we have of him, and of his will and purposes concerning us? I say proportionable to knowledge, for to believe in what a man has no knowledge, no distinct idea of, is to believe in, or worship a *fantom*; nothing at all. It is not properly believing but raving. And so much knowledge any man may have of God, as to lay a rational foundation for this religious dependance upon him, and regard to his divine paternal

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ternal authority over him, and over all things,
Rom. i. 19, 20.

God gave man reason or understanding, as a free agent, to qualify him in a certain measure to guide and govern himself; to govern and use the inferior creatures, and to exercise to good purposes that degree of freedom with which he has endow'd him; but not to render him *independant*, and *self-sufficient*. No finite understanding is sufficient for this. Man at his first creation, and in his utmost innocency, stood in need of *divine Revelation*, as well as of his own reason and senses to guide him safe to his own highest perfection and felicity, as much as an unexperienc'd child stands in need (for a long while at least) of paternal instruction and government. And nothing can render such child more acceptable and dear to his natural Parent than his *filial piety*. While *this* is preserved, the kind considerate Parent overlooks and forgives a thousand inadvertancies and faults which this is the proper means of correcting; but when this regard is shaken off, there is but little hopes of any good from a rebel, from a child who has no regard to parental authority, but has abandoned himself to his own ignorance, lusts, and wilfulness.

Faith, or a religious regard to God, is a necessary supplement to man's own *finite* understanding, to supply the natural weakness and

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insufficiency thereof, and is acceptable to God on account of its importance to man, as well as its own great propriety.

And a sincere regard to the dictates of *reason* and *conscience*, or what has been called the *moral sense*, considered as the *voice* and *law of God* to man, is really Faith in God, as truly as an equal regard to any *supernatural Revelation*.

This regard to God, to his instructions, his precepts, promises, or threatenings (however they are made known to man) is the greatest security of all human *virtue* and *right conduct*. *I fear God*, said Joseph to his Brethren, and therefore shall be sure to do you justice and no injury or unkindness: See *Gen. xlii. 18*. And again, How can I do this great wickedness, this so unreasonable thing, as he had before represented it, and at the same time sin against God? *Gen. xxxix. 8, 9, 10*.

But human Reason is weak, not extending to every thing which may be of importance to man; liable not to be sufficiently attended to in some instances to which it otherwise does extend; liable to mistake; nor does it arrive at that strength and maturity of which it is capable, but by slow degrees; by use, by observation, by experience, by social converse. We see it thus in children. It might, I think it must, have been thus, in some degree, in Adam, and in mankind in general, considered

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ed collectively. God has not therefore tyed himself down to this single way of guiding and governing mankind, namely, by their own inherent powers and capacities. He informed our first Parents of what neither their own senses nor reason could have sufficiently informed them, viz. the wholesomeness of every other fruit of the Garden of Eden for their food, except *one*, and the danger of *that*, which he therefore forbad them by his paternal authority, on pain of death, so much as to touch, though it was ever so fair and inviting to the eye.

Many other circumstances might occur wherein they might stand in need of supernatural direction, and they had it, I doubt not, in some satisfactory way; I mean such a way, as might fully satisfy them it came from God, and therefore required their implicit regard.

Whatever clearness of apprehension, whatever degree of mental accuteness and natural sagacity, as well as full growth of body and perfection of all his senses, Adam may be thought to have been possessed of immediately on his creation; yet none of that knowledge which ordinarily results from *reflection*, from a chain of reasoning and repeated experience, from studiously joining and comparing, separating and distinguishing, the Ideas received more immediately by sensation, could be obtained by him, on a sudden, in a *natural way*.

Whatever

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Whatever knowledge of this kind was immediately needful for him, must have been taught him in a supernatural and summary way; either by inspiration, by dream, or by the mediation of some angelick Being, or by all these methods, or any other which to infinite wisdom might seem proper at any time.

The brute creatures have this defect sufficiently and surprizingly made up to *them* by what we call *Instinct*.

We have Parents and Instructors of our own Species, who have lived in the world before us, to help to guide, to furnish and train up our unexperienced minds: But the *first human pair* could have no such *Tutors*, and therefore must have had this kind office done *them* by God himself, or some heavenly Being delegated by him for that purpose.

Man at his first creation (according to all we at present know of human nature) must have been for a long while as ignorant and as helpless as a *new-born Infant*, who does not really want *limbs, joints, muscles, sinews or strength*; but only *knowledge or skill* to rise up, stand and walk, or talk, or take hold of any thing with his hand; a skill not soon acquired with, much less without, foreign aid: And the first man must have stood in equal need of a nurse and leading-strings. If it be said, "God almighty might immediately impress upon his mind these necessary Ideas or knowledge";
what

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what is that less than *divine Inspiration*, or *supernatural Revelation*, the thing I am pleading for, as highly necessary in his then circumstances? *

As man's own knowledge increased, these divine informations might be intermitted or altered; but not wholly withdrawn. *Creatures* of ever so high rank, exalted faculties, improvements of reason, and degrees of free agency,

* Since the writing of this, I was agreeably surprized to meet with the following Extract from *Histoire Philosophique de l'Homme*, in the Appendix to the 36 Vol. of the monthly Review, P. 510.

“ Men of learning and genius seldom apply themselves to the study of man till the knowledge they have acquired has inspired them with a high opinion of themselves; no wonder therefore they have made so little progress in it. Their talents and acquisitions are a kind of microscope which magnifies man to their view, or rather, when they think they contemplate human nature, they only take a view of themselves with all their splendid appendages of science. Certain Savages, at the sight of the first Europeans who came among them, imagined their cloaths to be skins of various colours adhering to their bodies, like the skins of other animals. By a mistake of the same kind, though much more astonishing, our great men identify themselves in such a manner (if I may be allowed the expression) with their knowledge and acquired talents, that they look upon them as absolutely inseparable from their existence. The esteem and respect which these talents and acquired lights procure them from the rest of mankind, raise the splendor of them in their own eyes, and whatever efforts they may make to lay aside their prejudices, they have a considerable influence on all their enquiries? “ In

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agency, are never to become absolutely *independent*, or to think themselves so, or aspire to it. This was man's first crime, if not that of the fallen angels; and is perhaps what the writer to the Hebrews particularly means by *εὐπερίστατον ἁμαρτίαν*, the sin which doth so easily beset us. *Heb.* xii. 1. And when they are conscious of having offended their maker, some merciful intimations from him become still

“ In order to have a just notion of human nature we
 “ must go back to the very cradle of humanity, consider man in his primitive and original state, stripped
 “ of all that knowledge which time and a variety of
 “ circumstances and situation have procured him, and
 “ in the same condition with every other animal when
 “ it comes out of the hands of nature; we must
 “ trace him through his gradual openings, and the
 “ several steps of his progress; and not set out, like
 “ most modern writers, with considering the faculties
 “ and sentiments which are merely accidental” [I
 “ would rather have said adventitious] “ to his nature,
 “ and have their origin from the improvements and
 “ different circumstances of society.

I have long thought that the first human creatures, immediately upon their first existence, must have been (with respect to their minds) like innocent infants or savages, capable indeed, by proper help and application, of amazing improvements in knowledge and *habits* of virtue, as well as endowed with a moral sense, and capable of proportionable usefulness, and rational enjoyment, or felicity; but without proper help from God, under greater disadvantage in some respects than the Brutes, that so they might be more sensible of their dependance on God, and led to pay a due regard to him; and without this regard to him and improvement of his favour, liable to sink into a much worse condition than the Brutes;

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still more necessary unless he were utterly to destroy them, or abandon them to despair.

The infinitely wise and good *Father* of mankind, it may be reasonably expected, will ever adapt these his interpositions to the circumstances of his rational creatures, so as to give the faculties he has endowed them with, or given them the means of acquiring, particularly human *reason*, its full scope, and only supply the natural imperfection, or rectify

Brutes; into amazing stupidity, or degeneracy of mind, and corruption of manners.

The Question is not whether human Reason be insufficient, and supernatural Revelation necessary, to our *acceptance with God*? He will accept according to the improvement a man makes of what he has, and not of what he has not: but unassisted human reason is insufficient, and supernatural Revelation necessary to that *full improvement and perfection* of which God has made his human creature capable; and to guard him against, or recover him from the errors and misery to which his necessary freedom, as a moral agent, and a variety of temptations, render him liable.

The human mind, I think, could scarcely by its own powers (or soon at least) arrive at the notion of *an invisible being*, and without some supernatural light would have been very naturally led by appearances to worship the *Sun*, if not the whole *Host of Heaven*; as men did afterwards when they had slighted divine Revelation.

In short, we know not how much we owe to supernatural Revelation; nor how very short, as well as slow our improvements, how very gross and manifold our errors, would have been without it; as still too many arise from our mistaking it.

fy any dangerous accidental errors of it. And this may account for the different dispensations of God to mankind; which, however they may have varied as circumstances varied, yet all agree in this one general apparent design and tendency, viz. to keep up or restore a *proper regard to God* amongst men. And such a regard to the supreme Being is of the utmost importance to man, in that

I. It is the best support and defence of *Innocence and virtue*. Had not our first Parents broke through this restraint, they had never sinned; which may possibly be the reason why no other sin was at first threatened with death, but palpable infidelity or disregard to God.

There is indeed a Law written in man's heart; but a law is of little force without a Law-giver and Judge. Nothing therefore can be more conducive or necessary to a human creature's virtue, than a regard to God his Creator. Men easily leap over every other fence; and biased by animal nature, not only neglect, but refine away the law of their minds. The fornicator soon brings himself to think it as natural and rational to indulge that passion as to eat when he is hungry: The adulterer to esteem it no real, but merely an imaginary injury he does his neighbour, even though he palms upon him a spurious Heir to his Estate: The thief, the common cheat, the oppressor

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oppressor, the murderer brings himself by degrees to think his superior power, or cunning, or opportunity, or fancy'd necessary self-preservation, gives him as natural a right to make a prey of his weaker or more unguarded neighbour as any beast, or bird, or fish of prey to do the like by its fellow brute. But *the fear of God* has a tendency to check this licentiousness of the human mind, and the *love of God*, and of his moral attributes, which is our highest and best regard to him, is the surest and sweetest source of virtue in the heart of man.

II. It is the only source of true repentance, or reformation, where there is occasion for reformation. This can only flow from a fiducial regard to an offended God, and perswasion of his intended mercy; such assurance or intimation at least not only *Adam* had, but even *Cain*: whatever use the latter made of it. If *thou* doest well, shalt *thou* not be accepted? *Gen.* iv. 7. *Thou* as well as *Abel*, should he not yet be accepted, though he had not pleased God in the first offering he brought him?

III. This religious regard to God is the greatest possible support of the human mind, under all events that can happen to man, or be apprehended by him.

A *finite* thoughtful creature, exposed to innumerable accidents, and unforeseen as well as foreseen events, can have no solid security

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or comfort but from *confidence in God*; and the more quick he is of apprehension, so much the more need will he stand in of this resource.

Of such use, such advantage, such necessity to man, is *Faith in God*, or a religious regard to him; nor can any thing be more highly reasonable or becoming him.

For these reasons, no doubt, God insists so much upon it, has shewn such a peculiar regard to it, so highly rewarded and promised to reward it, and made it the most necessary term of his pardoning and accepting repenting sinners. For *this*, *Abel*, *Enoch* and *Noah*, were esteemed *righteous* before God; *Enoch* was translated that he should not see death; and *Noah* with his family were saved in the *ark*, while the rest, the irreligious unbelieving world, were drowned in the flood. For *this*, *Abraham*, the father of the faithful, is so signally celebrated in scripture, and was so applauded and rewarded of God: with many other scripture instances upon honourable record in the xi. chap. to *Heb.* But far above all these, is our Lord Jesus Christ held up to our view and imitation, in the two first verses of the next chapter, as *the brightest example of all*; as a perfect Pattern of this religious regard to God; *the chief leader, and perfecter of faith* — so it is in the original, τὸν τῆς πίστεως ἀρχηγὸν καὶ τελειωτὴν (the word [our] is not in the greek) i. e. a Pattern of *perfect faith*, and consequently
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of spotless innocence, virtue and goodness, in human nature.

Abel's faith and acceptance with God I have already mentioned; he was massacred for it by his irreligious brother, an early martyr for Faith in God.

When Seth was born and grown up, we are told, *Gen. iv. 26.* then began men to call upon the name of the Lord, or (as it is in the margin) to call themselves by the name of the Lord. Which ever rendering we prefer, this intimates an association in favour of Religion. There began to be a distinction betwixt the religious and irreligious, the believing and unbelieving part of mankind, and the former sort (who probably were chiefly of Seth's family) very early obtained the distinguishing title of *the Sons of God*: *Gen. vi. 2.*

The Faith, or Religion, of these worthy persons is sufficient proof that mankind wanted not the necessary instructions and proper inducements to be religious, notwithstanding any natural or contracted weakness or imperfection of the human mind. God had manifested himself to the *worst* as well as to the better sort of them, by *divine Revelation*, as well as by his *kind Providence*, to be a *merciful* Father, a God *pardonning* iniquity, transgression and sin, and a Rewarder of them who *diligently*, (*i. e.* honestly and sincerely) seek him: *Heb. xi. 6.*

But

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But when the generality of mankind abused this *grace of God*, it seems highly requisite he should make himself known by the *judgment* which he should execute, as well as by *mercy*, *Pf. ix. 16.* of which we have a tremendous instance in his drowning the whole world, and saving the only righteous or truly religious man that was left in it, and his household.

As judgment is God's unusual work, he determined to give but one instance of this dreadful dispensation of providence. And this, one would think, should have been a sufficient warning to all future ages of the world. But alas! in a few centuries afterwards we find *Religion* declining again, and now losing itself in *Idolatry* and *Superstition*. *Reason, Revelation, Tradition* and *Providence* disregarded, the weakness of human nature took *this* turn; and that regard which was due to God alone, was transferred to dumb Idols, the creatures of God, and sometimes the mere creatures of men's own vain imaginations.

The allwise God, though he never left himself without witness of his being and goodness, in the course of his providence, in any part or any age of the world, (*Acts xiv. 17.*) yet thought it proper to let mankind see by experience, how far they were liable to degenerate in their minds and morals, through the want of a due regard to him, because
they

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they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, as St. Paul accounts for it, *Rom. i. 28.* However, as he had before distinguished *Noah* on account of his singular piety in a degenerate age, so now, having proved *Abraham's* remarkable *faith*, he chose him to be his peculiar friend, and a succession of his descendants after him, to enjoy peculiar manifestations of his Being, perfections and providential government of the whole world as occasion offered; that the knowledge and fear of the one only living and true God might not be utterly lost from amongst men.

The very extraordinary providence God exercised towards the children of Israel, and the divinely inspired prophets he raised up amongst them from time to time for a long course of years; had an *immediate* tendency to this purpose among *that people*, and a *remote* one amongst the *Gentiles*.

Whatever particular persons, either Jews or Gentiles, truly and sincerely feared the supreme Being (though amidst great ignorance and mistakes about him) and wrought righteousness, without doubt, were ever accepted of God: *Acts x. 35.* and might truly be said to have faith in him. But the Jewish nation alone, considered as a *nation*, were separated or set apart by the peculiar providence of God, to preserve amongst them the knowledge and worship of the one living
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and true God, and were, on that account, represented as a *holy nation*, while all the other *nations* are said to be without God in the world: *ἀθεοί* athiest, it is in the original, *Ephes. ii. 12.*

While God expects from no man more than the honest improvements of the talents he intrusts him with, he may without injury to any, or the least just cause of complaint, intrust one man, one country, or one age with *five* talents, another with *two*, and another but with *one*. And he that has but *one* such talent, and rightly improves it, is as sure to be accepted of a righteous God, as he who improves his *five*.

Both Jews and Gentiles, considered in their collective capacities, sadly misimproved their different *talents*, whatever some particulars amongst the one or the other of them might do; they grew shamefully defective in their regards to God, and corrupt in their morals: See the two first chapters to the *Rom.* God might hereupon have represented himself a second time as repenting that he had made man upon the earth, and, but for his promise to Noah, have brought a second flood upon the whole world; or might without any breach of promise, or any charge of injustice, have burnt it to ashes. Instead of this, to overcome us, if possible, with kindness, he sends his own Son into the world, not thus to judge

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judge and condemn it; but at the certain foreseen loss of his own precious life to offer life and salvation to all mankind, Jews and Gentiles; to give repentance, i. e. the offer, or privilege of repentance, and remission of sins; to bless us in turning us from all our iniquities; to restore true religion and virtue in a very degenerate world, and sends him for this purpose invested with *divine authority*; with all the authority of the *Father* himself, abundantly proved by unexceptionable credentials; by his reversing at pleasure the common course of nature; by fulfilling a long series of ancient prophecies from the beginning of the world; by his knowing and discovering the most secret thoughts of men's hearts; by his whole consistent good character; by the wisdom, reasonableness, and purity of his doctrines and precepts; and the godlike execution of a design every way worthy of God, by his rising again from the dead, and ascending bodily up into Heaven before a multitude of eye witnesses; and by conferring miraculous gifts and powers on his apostles, and many others soon afterwards, as he had foretold in his life-time.

To reverence this son of God, this Teacher come from God, and thereby pay a proper regard to the *Father* himself who sent him, cordially to receive and comply with this last great messenger, and kind message

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from God to men, is the least that can be expected from mankind. And *this* is the *Faith*, or regard to God which he requires, wherever the gospel or christian religion is fairly published.

Wherever the great searcher of hearts sees this sincere regard to himself he will forgive not only all our sins of infirmity, but even willful transgressions sincerely repented of and forsaken; and by his spirit, ordinances, and providence, favour, assist and befriend us in all our honest endeavours to overcome bad habits, contract good ones, and become holy as he is holy, and merciful as our Father in Heaven is merciful: Will guide us with his councils, and afterwards receive us to Glory. Such is the good will of God to mankind; but without a suitable regard to him, it is impossible we should be acceptable to him or please him, and infinitely unreasonable to expect it.

I shall conclude this subject with some reflections. And in the first place,

According to this account, the *Faith* which is so acceptable, so necessary to acceptance with God, and of such importance to Many, does not consist in *opinion*, in mere opinion though ever so true; but in the *temper* and *disposition* of the mind towards God. It is not so much the business of
of

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of the *head* as of the *heart*: *Rom, x. 10.* with the heart man believeth unto righteousness. 'Tis the act of the will, 'tis really *virtue*, or *morality*, and unbelief is *immorality* towards God, as much as charity is virtue, and injustice or cruelty is immorality towards our fellow creatures. It does not require any extraordinary learning, or natural parts, or acuteness of understanding; but only the honest exercise of *reason* and *common sense*; and therefore is what every human mind is capable of, when it arrives at the use of reason, and is in duty bound to exercise. It is variously and indifferently term'd in scripture, *knowing God, fearing God, obeying God, believing in God, loving God*, and the like. For observe, secondly,

It is ever necessarily productive of, and accompanied with *sincere obedience to God*. It is itself *obedience in the heart*, (as looking on a woman to lust after her is committing adultery with her *there*) and is, proportionable to its degree of strength and vigour, certainly productive of it in the life and conversation; that it ever fails in any measure of this fruit, is owing to the weakness and imperfection of it; and apostacy from virtue to its death. But such sincere obedience persisted in, leads the way to habitual obedience, and the steady practice of all virtue.

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By these means the natural weakness, and imperfection of the human mind, arising from its attachment to the body or flesh, and to this world and sensitive objects, is gradually to be overcome, and such a confirmed habit of virtue to be contracted, as may be proof against all temptation to sin; that man may at last arrive at the stability of the *holy Angels*, and far above that of *Adam in Innocency*. Thirdly,

This account of *Faith*, so agreeable to the whole tenour of scripture, even of both Testaments, might, I should think, put an end to the disputes about *Faith* and *good works*, and justification thereby.

By *sinless obedience* no mere man can expect to be justified before God, or please him; not because God would not be pleased with such obedience to his Laws; but by reason of the sufficiently experienced weakness and infirmity of mankind, from the very beginning of the world, and the strictness of the eternal unalterable law of *right and wrong* to such creatures as we are, the *Law of reason*, which extends to the very motions and desires of the heart. Nevertheless through the grace and mercy of God to mankind, abundantly manifested by our Lord Jesus Christ, He will accept of the *sincere obedience of the heart*, i. e. in other terms of *Faith*, or our sincere desire and endeavour

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endeavour to please him, and thankful dependance on his promised mercy, and will impute *this* to us for *righteousness*. And so, though death be the ever so proper and deserved wages of all sin; yet the *free gift* of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Rom. vi. 23.* He will accept of the *will* for the *deed*; according to what the apostle said, *2 Cor. viii. 12.* If there be a willing mind, it is accepted, according to what a man hath, and not according to what he hath not.

When St. Paul speaks of the *works* of the law, as not capable of justifying a person, he has respect to the weakness of human nature, and means *perfect obedience*, in the thought and desire of the heart, as well as the outward behaviour, See *Rom. vii. 7.* When St. James speaks of *Faith alone* as insufficient for this purpose, he plainly means, *faith without works, dead faith*, as he justly stiles it, or mere *knowledge* or *opinion*, which, how early soever it began to pass for *Faith* amongst some professors of christianity, can never be the true scripture *Faith*; can never be such in the esteem of the searcher of hearts.

Any one may see this difference, who carefully peruses the several passages, in these two sacred writers, which relate to this affair, and attends to the very different circumstances,

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stances, and occasions of their writing. St. Paul has a reference to the Jews, who expected justification from the *observance of their Law*; St. James to those (whether *Jews* or *Gentiles*) who expected it on account of their *profession of the christian religion*, which is indeed sometimes stiled *the faith*, and the profession of which, while nothing appears to the contrary, is charitably supposed *amongst men*, to come from the *heart*; but must *really* do so to find acceptance with God. St. James therefore insists so much upon works, as indeed St. Paul, and our Saviour himself, and all the sacred writers insist upon the same, and all the *faith* in the world without this is dead, and of no value. Indeed, *dead faith* is not *faith* properly speaking, as a dead man is not properly a man, but a *corps*, though in common speech he may be stiled so.

What signifies it what a man's *opinion* is concerning God or Christ, or any thing, if he is never the better man for it? But *faith*, as I have endeavoured to describe it, a sincere regard to God, and all his revealed will; an unfeigned desire and endeavour to know and do his will, to obey and imitate him, and Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent, with submission to the dispensations of his providence, and reliance on his promised mercy, in and through a dear redeemer, is productive

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ductive of every thing that is amiable and desirable in the temper and behaviour of man

To what little good purpose, not to say bad purpose, alas! have christian divines for near fifteen centuries, Bishops, Popes, Councils and assemblies of them, innumerable, been employed in defining *faith*, and leading persons to consider it as mere *opinion*, too regardless of the scripture definitions of it, which represents it as something voluntary, and active, viz. *To know * the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent. To fear God and keep his commandments, to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God.*

Mere opinion depends not on man's will or the goodness of his heart, but upon a thousand accidents, and in itself therefore can neither be virtuous nor criminal; the representing it so, and substituting it in the room of true *gospel faith*, is what has given rise to all the angry controversies and *schisms*, which have so long and grievously distracted the christian church. *True faith* with its inseparable companion, *charity*, would have prevented them, and is the only *balm* to heal them all. Fourthly,

Nothing

* In what sense our Saviour uses the term [know] appears from his use of it in other places, particularly *Mat. vii. 23. I never knew you, &c.*

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Nothing else, no other temper or conduct, can sit so easy on the human mind, nor furnish out such rational solid security, peace, content and joy. 'Tis uniting ourselves with the Deity, making the almighty our assured friend; 'tis casting ourselves into the open gracious arms of the father of the universe, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our God and Father, more ready than any human Parent to receive and protect us; and bless us not only far above our deserts, but infinitely beyond all human conception to all eternity. 'Tis *dwelling in the secret place of the most high*, and *abiding under the shadow of the almighty*. We are assured hereupon by him who cannot deceive us, that our sins are all forgiven; by the over-ruler of all events, that all things work together for good to us in this life, and of perfect and eternal felicity in a life to come: and what can man desire more? To conclude,

How very much does it import us to cultivate in our breasts this true, this only true and effectual security of all human virtue, perfection and eternal happiness! To acquaint ourselves with God, contemplating his works of creation and providence; seriously worshiping him, both in publick and private; studying the sacred scriptures, wherein we have so early and so authentic

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a history of his proceedings with mankind, and of the *faith* or religious regard of some of the best of them towards him, the revolt of others from him; comparing all with our own experience of his providence and mercy to ourselves, and the feelings and workings of our own hearts, and the report of our consciences with respect to our own temper, and conduct towards God; and saying, "Lord, I believe, forgive and
" help thou my unbelief, my too weak,
" wavering and imperfect faith; Lord in-
" crease my faith, increase daily my reli-
" gious regard to thee, and to Jesus Christ
" whom thou has sent, and to all the in-
" structions, precepts, warnings, and pro-
" mises of thy holy Gospel? *Amen.*

*A Sketch of the wise and kind proceedings of
GOD towards Man, in order to take them
in at one View.*

Though God created man, as well as every other creature, *very good*; it does not follow, that he made him *at once* as perfect and happy as ever he intended him to become. God is the *Father* of mankind: if we consider the proper conduct of a father towards his children, through the several stages and circumstances of their advancement towards maturity, we shall find this to have been the conduct of God towards mankind. God makes man a compound of animal functions, ap-
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petites,

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petites, and passions, joined with a rational nature, or powers of reason and conscience to govern and controul his appetites and passions, and consequently a free, a moral accountable agent. The *animal nature* first displays itself, and, like all other animal natures, is under the protection and guidance of God, or other subordinate *rational* beings, whom he constitutes and appoints its governors and guardians for the proper time. *Human reason* gradually opens, and prepares to take this charge upon itself, under the inspection and patronage of the great Father of Spirits.

Thus Man becomes (according to his measure) a light and a law unto himself; to whom his heavenly Father may yet give what supernatural light, or positive command, he sees proper; and enforce a regard thereto by what sanction he pleases, to keep up such a filial regard to him, and dependance upon him, as men's *finite* imperfect nature renders *necessary* for them, as well as becoming them. Such provision is made in the very constitution of mankind, and the providence of God for our right and safe behaviour, and right use of those *faculties*, and of that degree of *freedom* he has endowed us with. But still, through the force of the animal appetites and passions, the weakness or inattention of reason, and the example or seduction of others, weak or evil beings, man is liable to act amiss; to stifle reason, slight divine revelation
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and authority, heighten his appetites and passions by indulgence, wound and sear his conscience, abase and corrupt his nature, instead of perfecting it; for, though created good, he has no way, even whilst innocent, to become *confirmed* in goodness, and in obedience to reason and to God, but by habituating himself thereto, and overcoming trials and temptations to the contrary; therefore is placed in a state of trial, and exposed to temptations, but still under the gracious eye of his heavenly Father.

This was the case of *Adam* in Paradise, and is the case of every man that is born into the world. Thus every man is *effectually* and *criminally* tempted, when, instead of hearkening to his *reason* and his *God*, he is drawn away of his own *lust* and enticed. *Jam. i. 14.*

The grand Seducer of our first parents knew (perhaps from his own fatal experience) the propensity of a rational creature, endowed with a considerable degree of *liberty*, to grasp at more; to affect *independency*, to be *as God's*, *knowing good and evil*, i. e. their ownelves, without, or even contrary to paternal information or precept. And this is the first thing to be guarded against in the education of children, or it will cost a severer discipline to reduce them to filial obedience, and a proper necessary submission of their wills to that of their superiors. The second

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Adam, our better pattern, avoided this rock the other split upon; baffled the tempter; and though *in the form of God*, ὡς ἀρπαγμὸν ἡγήσατο *did not* (like our first parent) *aēt the robbery to be equal with God,* or lead the way to such impiety; but humbled himself, and became obedient to death, even the death of the cross; wherefore God hath highly exalted him, Phil. ii. 6. and he is most justly stiled, and recommended to our imitation above all other examples whatsoever, as τὸν τῆς πίστεως ἀρχηγὸν καὶ τελειωτὴν, the leader, and perfecter of faith, or of thorough steady religion towards God, and dependance on God, carry'd to the utmost pitch of perfection: Heb. xii. 2.*

The all-wise God well knew what he did when he created this world, and such a creature as *man*, and plac'd him, for his trial, in such circumstances; and how, at last, to bring *good*, even to man himself, out of the *evil* which might arise. He mercifully design'd, therefore, before the world began, to pardon man's sin upon his repentance, and to make allowance for human infirmities and tempta-

* Whether or not this be the true sense of this controverted text, as the writer submits it to the judgment of the public, I shall not take upon me to decide, ἡγεομαι is derived from ἄγω, and has the same signification; the primary sense whereof is, perhaps, like *ago* in Latin, simply *to aēt*; and the secondary ones *to lead the way in*, or *to judge concerning any action*, &c. Dr. Sykes has observed, that ἀρπαγμὸν properly signifies the *aēt* of robbery, and ἀρπαγμα the thing stolen, or taken by force.

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temptations, where there was a sincere honest religious purpose of heart to *do*, or *return* to our duty. This grace, or favour, he purposed to shew us in, and through, *a Mediator*, in order to endear *him* to us, whom he designed, from before the foundation of the world, to be *Lord* over us: *him* for whom, as well as *by* whom, the world was made. *Him*, under whose tuition we were to be made perfect, or trained up to the highest pitch of rationality, spiritual-mindedness, confirm'd piety, charity, purity, wisdom, and self-government our nature is capable of: 1 *Cor.* xv. 45—49. *Heb.* xi. 40.

This grace of God was various ways signified to *Adam*, and all his posterity, *Cain* not excepted, for their encouragement, though fallen. Some, no doubt, in all ages and countries answered the end of it, *sincerely* fear'd, obey'd, and trusted in God in proportion as he made himself and his mercy known to them: and thus was *christianity* (without a sneer) *as old as the creation*.

But the generality of mankind, in time, corrupted their notions of God, and of a Mediator; and in their vain imaginations form'd to themselves Gods many, and Lords (or mediators) many, and religions as many, if they may be call'd gods and lords and religions. The Almighty suffer'd this for some time, as he did our first Parents fall, to prove mankind;
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to let them find out their own weakness, and need of divine mercy to pardon, and grace to help them in their time of need; and their need of his paternal instruction and government; which they had all of them more or less universally slighted. So that not only the *Law* to the *Jews*, but the *Providence of God* to the *whole World* was a kind of *school-master* to bring them to *Christ*, that they might be justify'd by *Faith*.

At last, the promis'd Saviour and Mediator appear'd in our nature to reform all these abuses; to bless us in turning away every one of us from our iniquities; to make us more rational, spiritual, religious, virtuous, and heavenly minded. He became flesh and dwelt amongst men, expos'd to all the same, and as great temptations and trials as ever innocent man was, or could be, expos'd to, living and dying, yet without the least sin. Was he not by this compleatly qualify'd to reform the world: he who had neither beam nor mote in his own eye, to pluck the one or the other out of ours? This therefore is his office.

And as, in order to strike mankind with the greater terror on account of sin, and particularly *irreligion, unbelief, or disobedience to their maker, and casting off their dependence upon him*, God punish'd *Adam* for *this* his first transgression, by adjudging him and his posterity to death; and drowned the old world,

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world, at once, with a flood, for their abuse of his grace : so, to encourage all mankind to repent, and to aspire to the piety, wisdom, virtue, and perfection they were design'd for, he rewards the second *Adam*, the Lord from heaven, for his most *perfect obedience* even unto the death of the cross, by restoring not only him, but all mankind, to life again, *for his sake*, and giving eternal life and happiness, for his sake, to all who truly believe, and sincerely repent, from the first man *Adam*, down to the last that shall be born into the world.

To *believe*, is to pay a due regard to God, and to whatsoever either reason, or supernatural revelation informs us, is his will and purpose concerning us ; not only as it appears in itself *reasonable*, but *as it is the word and will of God* : in short, a voluntary religious dependence upon God.

To *repent*, is to be suitably affected with what either we ourselves, or mankind in general, have done amiss, and heartily to endeavour reformation.

Faith, or religious regard to God, in an innocent rational creature, is the best preservative against sin. Adam's *faith* fail'd him, or he had not transgress'd : and *unbelief*, or irreligion, is perhaps the *εὐπερίστατον αἵμαρτίαν*, *Heb. xii. 1. the sin which easily besets us* : 'tis certainly what that writer is there particularly caution-

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cautioning against. *Faith*, in a fallen creature, to whom divine mercy is shewn, produces *repentance*, and reformation, upon a principle of gratitude; and our merciful Father, of his own free grace, accepts of it, and imputes it to such a one for *righteousness*.

This faith, so acceptable to God, can only be expected in proportion to the informations given mankind of his merciful nature, and merciful intentions and proceedings towards them: therefore not only *Adam*, *Abel*, *Noah*, *Enoch*, *Abraham*, *David*, and those who, before our Saviour's coming, enjoy'd supernatural revelations from heaven, were capable of this *justifying faith*: but God left not himself without witness in the darkest parts of the heathen world, in that he did men good, and gave them rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling their hearts with food and gladness; and therefore in every age, and every nation, he that *feareth God*, i. e. *believeth*, and *worketh righteousness*, is accepted of God, *Acts* x. 35. but without *faith* it is impossible to please him, i. e. be accepted of God: *Heb.* xi. 6.

As God's treating frail and fallen mankind upon this most encouraging footing, is of mere grace; so is every different degree, in which, from time to time, he opens or reveals to them, or any of them, this his gracious purpose: and the last revelation by his
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son from heaven, in the gospel, exceeds all former ones ; is *light* and *grace*, by way of eminence and distinction, and calls for proportionable *faith* or regard in all those who are so highly and distinguishingly favour'd ; demands the highest gratitude, obedience, and confidence towards God, and his Christ, whom he hath constituted our prophet, priest, and king, to turn us (if any thing will do it) from all the power of satan unto God.

That *life* and *immortality*, which was but darkly shadow'd out before, is brought to light by the gospel, and yields mankind the greatest consolation ; and this is *life eternal*, that they may know (*i. e.* believe in) the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent ; *i. e.* may devote and yield themselves freely and absolutely to his instruction and government, trust in his mercy, and acquiesce in his providence under this most worthy mediator, who has purchas'd them with his precious blood, and is invested with full authority over them, and over all things for the carrying on of this salutary scheme of divine grace to mankind.

Thus hath he, who may do what he will with his own free gifts, given to some persons, some countries, and some ages of the world, five talents to occupy ; to others two ; and to some, in comparison, but one : yet some light and grace, more or less, to all

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men in all ages, and countries; and will accept, or reject them in proportion to their improvement, or neglect thereof. To whom much is given, of them will the more be required.

Christians stand the fairest of all men for the highest improvements, and advancement in true wisdom, holiness, usefulness, and happiness; and, at the same time, are in danger of sinking into the greatest degeneracy, and severest condemnation; according as they improve on the one hand, or on the other hand reject, or neglect, this *so great Salvation*. They have by far the most striking demonstration of God's good will towards men; the greatest encouragement to trust in God, notwithstanding his most holy nature, heart-searching eye, strict justice, and their own manifold offences; the greatest inducements and helps to resist temptations to sin, to resolve and strive to deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world; and to do good as they have opportunity to all men. They have the plainest instructions for this purpose, inculcated continually upon them; the most perfect and amiable pattern set before them in their own nature; the greatest rewards imaginable tendered to draw them, the most awful warnings and threatnings denounc'd against impenitent abusers

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busers of all this grace, to alarm and drive sinners to repentance and the holy spirit, and kind and wise providence of God to befriend them in all their sincere endeavours to please God, and to imitate and obey his son Jesus Christ.

And lastly, when the seducer of mankind had found means to draw, even the professors of christianity into the grossest corruption of this most rational religion; God in his providence opened a way for the reformation thereof, by preserving the sacred writings, and a variety of ancient copies and versions thereof, and raising up men of integrity, judgment, and spirit, to study the scriptures, and stand up for pure primitive christianity, against all innovations, notwithstanding all discouragements; and even great earthly princes and potentates to countenance and encourage this truly christian spirit and liberty, and protect inquisitive persons in these researches after truth. So that God may, with the highest reason, *now* say, what could have been done for mankind, and I have not done it? and we have abundant reason to reflect on his most gracious dispensations with the highest gratitude and love.

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The Importance of Truth.

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and standing up for the christianity, all
against all iniquity, and all against all
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principles and potencies to corruption and en-
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the highest reason, say, what could have
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it; and we have abundant reason to reflect on
his most generous dispositions with the right-
est gratitude and love.

F. I. W. L. S.

